

Annual Report 2023

Reimagine your Community, Reengage the World, and Rediscover Innovation



RUTGERS

Community Leadership Center
Camden

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A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Reimagine your Community, Reengage the World, and Rediscover Innovation

Encapsulated in the theme for this year's Community Leadership Center Annual Report –*Reimagine your Community, Reengage the World, and Rediscover Innovation*, is our continued commitment to ensuring that we engage in programs and initiatives that respond to the urgent needs not only of our own local communities but, also of efforts that impact communities globally. We all know education is an investment in knowledge and it pays the best interest when our graduates excelled. We are at a turning point in our institution, as we educate our youngsters to become world scholars, as education is the new passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare to compete in the world. We have aligned our work of higher education as one K-16 pipeline system, a critical step to ensure our students and communities can become engines of knowledge, transformation of justice, and a sustainable future.

The work of the Community Leadership Center this year continues to be at the forefront of efforts that are reaching children locally from birth through college, as we strengthen our educational pipelines and cultivate the kinds of initiatives that lead to prosperous futures; and that creates the conditions for the university to be part of a new vision that positions education as drivers of a common good. We have been successful with our local work with the LEAP schools and the Early Learning Research Academy, but our future needs to extend from Camden. It must also encompass our global responsibility for helping solve challenges in other countries and territories. Our work in Puerto Rico and Paraguay are testament of what we can do as institutions and as individuals to guarantee that our work builds on the human rights principles that include inclusion and equity, cooperation and solidarity. We have a collective responsibility to address widening social and economic equality,



We aim to create the conditions for the university to be part of a new vision that positions education as a driver of the common good.

issues of community-based sustainability. To do so, we must continue to promote a more equitable, ethical and transparent society that can fully partake in the democratic freedoms that are so fundamental to reimagining our interconnected futures. Our work in Puerto Rico and Paraguay brings us closer to finding those solutions and focusing on education as an important catalyst for change and transformation.

Throughout the year, we have worked to support the experiences of thousands and children and youth; we have collaborated with Rutgers-Camden faculty to cultivate the research and teaching opportunities that contribute knowledge, while facilitating educational opportunities and exchanges to ensure that we maximize our institutional talents; and that we provide mechanisms to engage our graduate and undergraduate students in experiences that not only enhance their academic trajectory, but also prepare them to become global citizens.

This report represents a synopsis of this work and opens the door to new partners that are interested in joining this work with us. The staff, students, faculty, university leadership and community partners have provided strength and purpose for this work, and they are our compass to continue forging ahead an agenda that is futuristic and transformative and grounded in human rights, social justice, respect for life, human dignity and cultural diversity. Our approach has been based on anchoring the important principles of reciprocity and solidarity as we ensure that we build a new social contract for education as a catalyst for change and reimagining our future from local to global. I invite to read the report, share it and find ways to connect.

Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago

Rutgers Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor
Director, Rutgers-Camden Community Leadership Center

PARAGUAY

Building on the Foundation of Collaboration: HECEET Going Strong in Paraguay





Between 2016-2018 Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Board of Governors, Distinguished Service Professor at Rutgers University, was granted a Fulbright Fellowship to work in Paraguay at the Universidad Nacional de Asunción (UNA). During that time Dr. Bonilla-Santiago collaborated with the UNA's leadership and the United States Embassy on research-based strategies to reposition the university as an anchor for a progressive agenda that could improve research and pedagogy and would eventually reach beyond the university's walls to fortify civic engagement. Her time as a Fulbright fellow culminated with a major conference guided by the theme *The Future of the New University in Paraguay*. This set the tone for future projects helmed by the UNA.



Solid Footing: From HECEET to a Multi-faceted Academic Partnership

In 2019, Dr. Bonilla-Santiago secured a \$3 million three-year grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to develop the Higher Education Center for Ethics, Equity, and Transparency (HECEET) at the UNA. HECEET focused on strengthening UNA's institutional capacity by developing leaders who will rise across different sectors of Paraguayan society. Furthermore, as part of this initiative the faculty, students, and staff within the institution will be guided by a focus on ethics, equity, and transparency.

The true purpose of HECEET has been to guide UNA to become the epicenter for the promotion of a culture of lawfulness and EET values and practice. At the same time, the program has helped the UNA develop its own tools during its transformational journey toward self-reliance.

This collaboration has helped to elevate the university's infrastructure resulting in a strengthening of research pursuits, curriculum development, and academic enrichment. The UNA stands as a pillar of EET and the Rule of Law, which will serve as anchors in the fight against corruption.





“Global university partnerships provide unique opportunities to advance the potential of the academic mission. When strategically designed, these collaborations have tremendous potential to serve as neutral conveners and collectively leverage the talent of faculty and students. They provide unique experiences to elevate academic programs and research through the lens of diverse perspectives building on the exchange of knowledge and expertise. The results often lead to creative and innovative methods of contributing to solutions for global societal and economic challenges. Rutgers-Camden is committed to making the academic partnership with UNA a model for success in international university collaboration.”

Dr. Sandra Richtermeyer,
Executive Vice Chancellor for
Academic Affairs and Provost of
Rutgers University–Camden



The HECEET approach is based on three areas of focus.

- Strengthen UNA's institutional and leadership capacity.
- Cultivate individual capacity and awareness to strengthen leadership.
- Reach beyond the academic setting to engage and extend its impact through partnership building civic engagement.

For this reason, HECEET is not merely an academic exercise, it is a catalyst for real and positive societal change. The movement starts at the university level but then reaches out throughout the sectors of Paraguayan society.

Major Achievements: The Early Phase of the partnership

So much ground has been covered over the past few years in the execution of this program. The primary focus has been on human capacity building through multi-sectoral training that includes faculty, academic leaders, staff and students. The philosophy behind this initiative is very similar to the adage, “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.” The work in Paraguay was never intended to be a lecture series or a finite collaboration, instead, it was meant to amplify the elements of Ethics, Equity and Transparency and build leadership prepared and motivated to take the university into a new era. The HECEET Ambassadors Program served as the strategy to train scholars so that they could embody and then pass on the foundational principles inherent in the program.

- The EET Ambassadors Program - Certificate Leadership Program for Ethics, Equity, and Transparency trained 119 ambassadors in three cohorts. A Train-the-Trainer Handbook was developed to allow for continued replication and expansion of the program.
- An important and impactful component of the EET Program has been the development of Research Zone of Practice projects. Between all three cohorts of the program, 16 Zone of Practice Social Projects have been developed and launched. These projects reach beyond the university classrooms and into the community at large.

Research Now and Going Forward

Collaboration has always been a key goal of the HECEET program and to that end, Rutgers faculty members have been paired with scholars from UNA to develop projects and research opportunities that will have a lasting impact on all who are involved. A

special issue of the *UNA Journal* showcased some of the work that has been done. This exchange of ideas has served to strengthen the EET practices that Rutgers University has modeled and that UNA has embedded in its academic practices going forward.

In a continuing effort to support sustainable academic collaboration, Rutgers University is helping to promote and facilitate student exchanges. It is an institutional priority. Opportunities and synergies have been developed with the result of offering a variety of doctoral-level degrees to exchange students. UNA is looking for strategies to increase the pool of doctoral-level faculty. Strengthening the doctoral and graduate degree offerings requires a cadre of faculty prepared in their disciplines. The HECEET program along with the dedication of the staff of Rutgers University is helping to make this happen.

To strengthen this commitment, Rutgers University-Camden Chancellor, Antonio D. Tillis has pledged to sustain the partnership with UNA and invest \$250,000 over five years at the level of \$50,000 per year. This began in the Fall of 2022 and continues now.

The ongoing work of the HECEET program has produced real results. The research projects developed and executed by the participants in this program have had a far-reaching impact on the academic landscape as well as in the communities in which much of the research has been targeted. Some of the exciting research developed include the following:

- Identification of incentives for the permanence of native students in nursing and midwifery careers by Aida Lucia Maidana and Maureen Donaghy.
- Equity, transparency, and resilience in vulnerable areas by Federico Vargas and Maureen Donaghy.
- Strategies for the reduction of abandoned animals in the streets of the city of Concepción through shared responsibility in the framework of ethics, equity, and transparency by Juana Elisa León and Patrice Mareschal.
- Evaluation of an educational strategy on ethics, equity, and transparency in the basic school educational community of Santa Rosa del Aguaray by Gladys Mercedes Estigarribia and Patrice Mareschal.
- Creation of ethical and transparent processes for the acquisition of human teeth for teaching in dentistry by María Soledad Meza Vera, Kimberlee Moran, and David Salas. This work was published in the Journal of Dental Education.

“Research, science, and technology cannot be alien to ethics, equity, and transparency. These three values should direct any researcher in the creation of useful knowledge for society. The Leadership Certification course in EET promotes the observance of these values, which is so important at all times.”

Dr. Javier Barúa

General Director for Scientific and Technological Research
Universidad Nacional de Asunción



Extending Global Opportunities to Students Through Applied Experiences



“The global world is part of our daily lives, international exchanges are important not only for research and our collaborators, but they provide very valuable experiences for our students.”

Dr. Antonio D. Tillis

Chancellor, Rutgers University
– Camden

- Planning for forest landscape restoration: A case of gender equity by María Laura Quevedo and David Salas.
- Improving public health and quality of life as a mechanism for increasing EET by Pablina Rodríguez and Maria Solesio.
- Ethics, equity, and transparency in the virtual modality in higher education by Marta Antoliana Lara and Maria Solesio.
- Obstacles and alternative solutions for equity in vulnerable populations by Héctor Ramón Leguizamó and Nancy Pontes. This work was published in Revista Científica de la Facultad de Filosofía de la UNA (RECIFUNA).
- Preventing adolescent pregnancy: A shared ethical responsibility for the sexual and reproductive health of the population by Gloria Isildina Ortiz and Nancy Pontes.

As part of a visit to Paraguay in the Spring of 2023, Dr. Santiago led a class titled *Sustainable Community Development Models and Practices* in which 10 students were enrolled. The students participated in a Student Conference with 300 students and faculty in attendance. The visiting students also worked on their case study development requirement, which was a part of their class. Throughout the semester, Rutgers students in the class collaborated with students in Paraguay using a virtual platform. During the visit to Paraguay, the students were able to present their case studies in a conference setting and visit community development sites in Paraguay. Case studies were developed jointly by the students involved in the program. This was supported by a grant from the Rutgers Global program.

A Plan for the Future

The joint work brought UNA leadership to visit Rutgers-Camden in early 2023 and a delegation of Rutgers-Camden academic leaders and faculty visited Paraguay in the Spring to continue the planning for the exchange. The time provided for meetings with BECAL, the national Paraguayan providing scholarship support to talented student that are pursuing graduate and doctoral level work in universities abroad. Through an MOU with BECAL, Rutgers is already setting up the structure to receive and support the first doctoral fellows.

2023 marked Year 2 of the five-year plan developed by the program. The focus has been on solidifying the student exchanges and developing those opportunities for joint courses to ensure that they can be launched by Year 3 of the exchange. Weaved into the Year 2 initiative will be the promotion and support of joint research projects that will lead to publications or scientific grants.

Looking ahead to Year 3 the focus will be to inaugurate the first cohorts of graduate/doctoral and post-doctoral students coming to Rutgers University to complete their degrees and pursue academic preparation. The goal is to help UNA build its doctoral-level programs by producing students with the credentials to be hired as faculty at various UNA academic departments.

As the plan progresses to Year 4 the established exchanges will be sustained with opportunities for research presentations of students in the program and opportunities for advancement in areas of research and publishing.

By Year 5, which is the final year of the formalized plan, the focus will be on institutionalizing the exchange, documenting best practices, and planning for future work.

PUERTO RICO

LEAP Social Enterprise.



Breaking Ground and Making a Difference

The proven results of the LEAP Academy Charter School serve as a model to other programs striving to apply its best practices. Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago and the Rutgers Community Leadership Center are invested in a strategy for impacting the educational outcomes of children in Puerto Rico through a partnership with LEAP Social Enterprise. The LEAP STEAM+E (i.e., Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics plus Entrepreneurship) Academy Of San Juan is its flagship school in Puerto Rico.

This non-profit organization was created with the intention of upscaling the LEAP Academy's best practices and educational strategies with the aim of improving scholastic outcomes for the children of Puerto Rico. In August 2021, the LEAP STEAM+E Academy of San Juan opened its doors in Sabana Llana, Puerto Rico, a community ranked among the poorest and least developed on the island and surrounded by low-income housing projects.



The LEAP STEAM+E Academy of San Juan is the largest Alianza School in Puerto Rico (Alianza School is the name used for charter schools in Puerto Rico), serving 735 students in grades K-11 and expanding to 780 when its student cohorts reach the twelfth grade. There are 49 teachers who work at the school and 11 members of the administrative and support staff. Of the students enrolled, 11% are receiving special education services. This comprehensive and dynamic approach is part of the collective commitment to advancing quality education in neighborhoods that need improved options and resources for their children.

Educational Strategies

The educational structure of the school has been designed to offer students every possible advantage. Class sizes are limited

The Mission of the LEAP STEAM+E Academy

To create, enhance, and sustain opportunities for children and families through the collaborative design, implementation, and integration of quality educational experiences, entrepreneurship career awareness, and support services that lead to academic success, family preservation, and community prosperity.

to 20 students per classroom and individualized attention is a hallmark of classroom approaches. Applied learning is also a focus with an integrated curriculum that features project-based learning and participation in a fabrication lab that provides students with the chance to apply learned skills and expand their horizons through invention and experimentation. In terms of technology, students in the program are provided with a computer to use both in school and in their homes to take advantage of virtual learning opportunities.

To fortify a strong educational environment, a qualified teaching staff is crucial. LEAP STEAM+E teachers are selected based on their qualifications and abilities. These teachers are highly valued by the school and are compensated accordingly. They receive a competitive salary and health benefits plan. Professional development opportunities are also provided so that the teachers are always at the cutting edge of their profession. To maintain the high level expected of the educators, the school maintains an ongoing evaluation process and expects a high degree of accountability for all faculty and staff.

LEAP STEAM+E students also participate in an Early College Program that begins in the tenth grade. This advanced program gives students the opportunity to experience college-level classwork and obtain dual credits so that they can enter their future college program having already completed several college-level courses. The Early College Program has been developed in collaboration with Sacred Heart University.

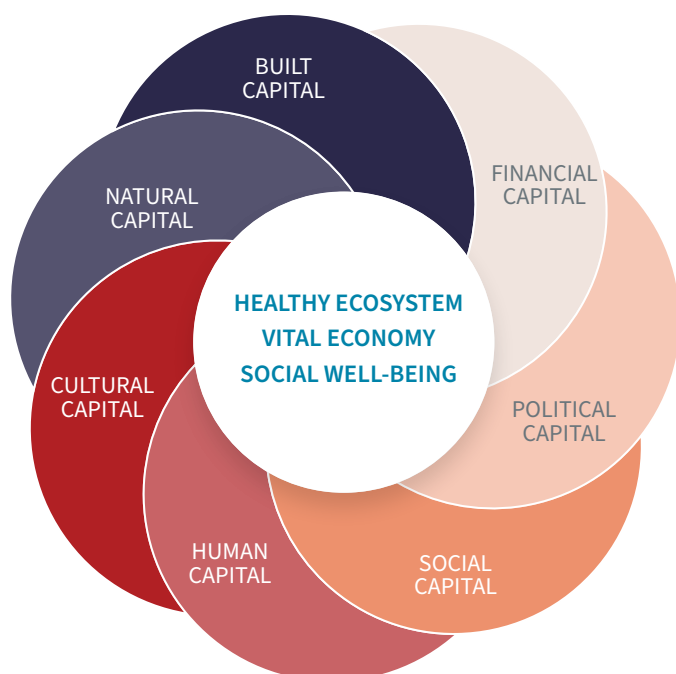
The mission of the LEAP STEAM+E Academy extends beyond the walls of the classroom. The school fosters positive relationships between parents and community members to ensure that students have access to a complete and supportive learning environment. Programs are offered to promote family development opportunities through social and emotional support as well as applicable job training.



For the students, the program addresses the entire picture of each child's needs including support for their social-emotional development. Nutrition is also an important component of the program with food programs that provide breakfast and lunch to the student body every day.

Asset Mapping

On October 18-21, 2023, Dr. Bonilla-Santiago led a group of doctoral students from her course, *Practicum on Sustainable Community Development Course from Rutgers University*, on a fact-finding mission in Puerto Rico to help get a clearer sense of the resources currently available and the tools still needed to continue the progression and advancement of the LEAP STEAM+E Academy schools on the island. This exercise, known as asset mapping, targeted neighborhoods including Parcelas Falu in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The information gathered during this trip will assist in the preparation of the new Community Development LEAP STEAM+ E HUB, which is being built in this area. The input from the community in asset building is crucial for developing this new project.



“Asset Mapping is not just another list of resources. It is a strategy to identify assets that are available from within the community, more importantly, it’s a process for connecting and engaging the community and to unlock the talents of people to help solve problems and build a better community.”

Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Rutgers Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor.

The practical goal of asset mapping is to document a community's existing resources, incorporating these strengths into community development work. The process of asset mapping can include identifying the institutions, individuals, and citizen associations existing within communities that serve as positive resources. The team will be utilizing the resources deemed as the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) as a tool for intervention.

Capital, in the context of the CCF, represents a range of resources found within the community that can be invested in to grow other capitals and benefit the community (This framework was developed by Cornelia and Jan Flora and is explored in their book, *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*, which was updated in 2013).

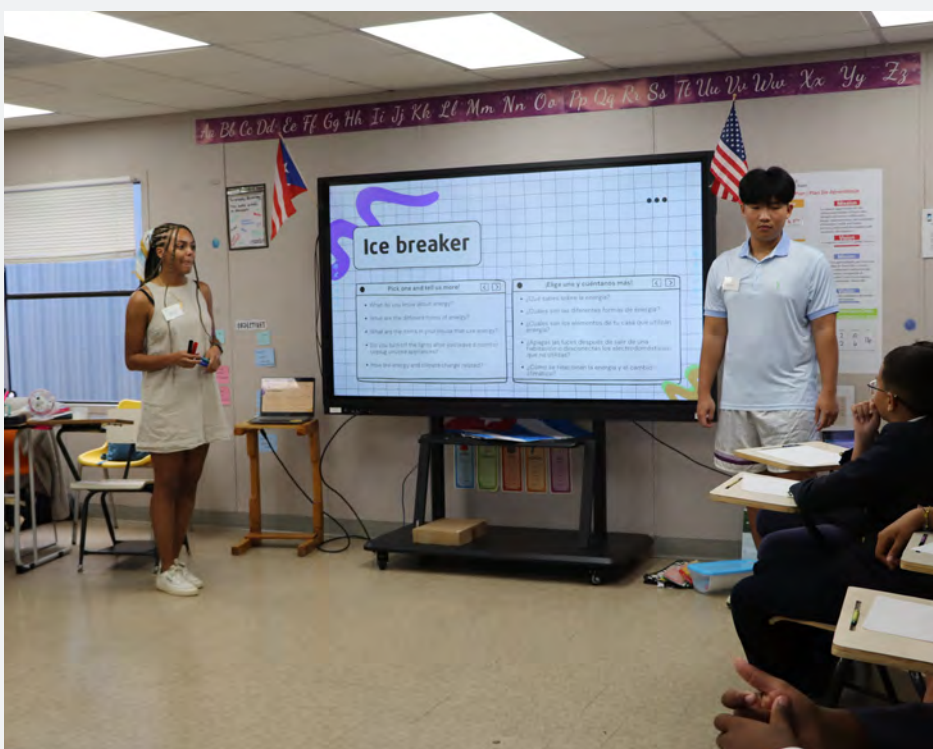
While on their trip to Puerto Rico, the doctoral students used two types of methodologies to complete their fact-finding mission. The first was a community walking asset assessment tool and the second was convening focus groups and appreciative inquiry with community ambassadors, parents, stakeholders, and teachers.

The information collected by the students will be developed into projects, the information and of which will be shared with the community members, architects, and ambassadors. The information will then be incorporated into the Community Development LEAP STEAM +E Hub Project.

Case studies developed by doctoral and graduate students

Melissa Thompson and John Paul Rosewater

completed a case study on “Navigating barriers and harnessing assets for nutrition security in Puerto Rico.” This case study sought to answer the following questions: What are the existing barriers to addressing nutrition security in Puerto Rico? What community assets exist in Puerto Rico that could be leveraged to address and improve nutrition security, and what potential strategies or development areas could be effective in overcoming the identified barriers? What is the current state of nutrition security in Puerto Rico, considering available data and observed trends within the community? Findings indicate that Puerto Rico currently depends on the U.S. for nearly every aspect of nutrition security and that the U.S. often fails to deliver relevant services. Puerto Rico has no meaningful way to engage with the U.S. political system and must solve its problems on its own. Communities have durable social capital networks internally but there is little collaboration between communities. Daily life in Puerto Rico is not conducive to nutrition security, as people lack the time, money, and knowledge to provide for themselves in a healthy manner.



Nelson Zhong and Oriana Holmes-Price focused their case study on “Puerto Rico Energy and Colonialism” with a focus on gaining a better understanding of Puerto Rico’s energy needs and the ways in which residents can be empowered to lead PR’s clean energy future. Students sought to answer the following question: “How do residents’ lived experiences and community assets illuminate the local impacts of energy colonialism in Puerto Rico?”. Students on the study introduced two key concepts: energy oppression and energy consciousness. They define individuals lived experiences of energy colonialism as examples of energy oppression. They concluded that by existing in a constant state energy oppression, residents must find ways to adapt to, mitigate, and resolve their energy problems.

Kandance Diedrick, Xiao Liang and Prakash

Kandel focused on “More than Just a School: an education hub as a capacity-building tool in community development: An exploratory case study in Parcelas Falú, San Juan, Puerto Rico”. This case study sought to answer the following questions: What are the barriers to quality education in Parcelas Falú, Puerto Rico? What forms of community capital are currently available in Parcelas Falú, Puerto Rico? What assets are needed to build capacity toward better education in Parcelas Falú, Puerto Rico? Overall study findings suggests that a comprehensive approach focused on community capacity building is needed to rebuild a sustainable education system in Parcelas Falú, San Juan. As Parcelas Falú seeks to rebuild and advance, a nuanced investigation into the role of educational institutions becomes crucial for fostering resilient, empowered communities and steering the area toward a more prosperous future.



James McCahill and Aditya Gahlot

focused on “Housing Issues and Assets in Parcelas Falú Sabana Llana, Puerto Rico.” This is the first study that explores housing issues and community assets in Parcelas Falú. Parcelas Falú is a low-income neighborhood in Puerto Rico, in which the majority of the population can barely afford housing. In addition, residents face crime and insecurity in the neighborhood. Therefore, the case study sought to answer the following questions: What are the housing issues related to safety, affordability, and accessibility within Parcelas Falú Community in Puerto Rico? What assets exist in the Parcelas Falu community that influence or help mitigate these issues related to housing?” To do so, research employs community asset mappings and focus groups with residents of the neighborhood. Three main themes that emerged from this case study as primary concerns of residents: (1) safety (gun violence, presence of drugs, hurricanes); (2) infrastructure (housing quality, broken appliances, limited cooling, accessibility); and (3) affordability and accessibility issues (limited information, bureaucratic hurdles, short term rentals, home ownership).

Puerto Rico Spotlight







Extending the Academy Reach for Puerto Rico

As pioneered by the LEAP Academy University Charter school a true cradle-to-career pathway is being carved for the Puerto Rican students who attend the LEAP STEAM+E Academies. Through the Rutgers Community Leadership Center (CLC), efforts are being made to develop a strategy to recruit attendees to Puerto Rico LEAP graduates to attend Rutgers University. This is contributing directly to Rutgers-Camden's efforts for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, as well as amplifying the work in cultivating first-generation students.

Dr. Santiago's ongoing strategy aims to bring the graduates from Puerto Rico closer to Rutgers-Camden. Among the support opportunities that have been made available to students, the Alfredo and Gloria Bonilla Santiago Scholars Program contributes to the Alfredo and Gloria Bonilla Santiago Endowed Scholarship Fund at Rutgers. This sets the foundation for offering scholarships to graduates of the school to attend college in New Jersey at Rutgers University--Camden.

The benefit is mutual, as an ongoing effort is being made to foster the exchange of ideas between Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland. Research agendas are being developed at universities in Puerto Rico as well as with research centers on the island. Areas of research interest include health, law, corruption, economic development, environmental justice, and education. Funding opportunities are being pursued on the federal level. By welcoming a myriad of academic perspectives, all academic institutions involved will benefit from the creation of new ideas, the integration of different cultural viewpoints, and the contextual application of new approaches to other territories outside the United States as we continue to enhance our global reach.

The Program's Commitment to Parents and the Surrounding Community

1. We recognize that all parents, regardless of their income, level of education, or cultural background, want to participate in their children's education and want the best for their children.
2. We link family and community engagement efforts to student learning.
3. We create initiatives that support families to guide their children's learning from kindergarten to high school.
4. We are committed to building the capacity of school staff to work with families.
5. We work with families to cultivate relationships based on trust and respect.
6. We believe in collaboration with families.
7. Our school serves as a community hub to serve all families and community members.

This initiative holds personal significance for Dr. Bonilla-Santiago having been born in Puerto Rico, where people of the Island hold a special place in her heart. When Dr. Bonilla-Santiago developed and launched the LEAP Academy in 1997, her hope was to expand the reach of the program beyond the borders of Camden, New Jersey. She and her team are committed to establishing systems that support children both locally and within developing countries.

Reimagining Schools Post COVID



Although the world seems to have moved past the pandemic, classrooms are still dealing with its repercussions. Learning loss is an area of concern and the faculty and staff of the LEAP Academy University Charter School continue to address the challenges of educational gaps left in the wake of the waning COVID-19 crisis. Throughout this past year, initiatives have been developed and enacted to meet these challenges head-on and the student body has endured and thrived as a result.

The impact of COVID has forced students to navigate upheavals

in their education and adapt to new ways of learning. Many of these changes have been difficult, as students and teachers have struggled with isolation, rapid changes in educational technology, and shifting regulations on physical distancing. However, the disruption to education has also created opportunities for lasting positive change in schools. The LEAP Academy has taken the trials of the pandemic and channeled them into forward momentum and evolution. While gaps in learning are being addressed and repaired, new and exciting learning methodologies are being explored and incorporated.



Core Design Elements

The LEAP Academy has evolved its key design elements to meet the ever-changing needs of its students and the community it serves. The four core design elements that have guided faculty and staff throughout 2023 include:

- **Upgrades** to ensure the facilities provide a safe, healthy, and welcoming in-person learning environment.
- **Reengagement** to mobilize the community, including students, staff, faculty, and parents/guardians to address the challenges of the post-pandemic landscape.
- **Academic recovery** as a primary focus in re-organizing and preparing the staff and faculty to support the student body on their continued college-aimed journey toward high academic achievement.
- **Enhancing the process** by building on existing structural and encouraging the staff and faculty to recommit and reimagine the academy's educational approaches and strategies.

Our Path to the Future

With these clear and focused design objectives, the LEAP Academy has carved out mission-specific goals to establish a path to the future. Over the next five years, the team will aim to:

- Strengthen the cradle-to-college approach through enhanced instructional programs across the grade levels from infancy to age 16.
- Improve the academic performance of the entire student body.
- Align the Centers of Excellence programs to the instructional core of the LEAP Academy.

LEAP stands for LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION, AND PARTNERSHIP. The LEAP Academy University School is a public charter school that serves families and children in Camden, New Jersey.

- Improve teaching and learning at all levels of the organization.
- Enhance the organizational capacity of operations, finance, and technology.
- Upscale and apply the LEAP Academy model to the LEAP Social Enterprise, Inc.

The LEAP Academy organization has articulated these mission-specific goals through tangible markers that confirm its progress. At the start of the 2022-2023 school year, the goal was to reach 100% of LEAP Academy high school seniors to graduate; 90% of seniors completing dual college courses; and 80% of seniors gaining acceptance to a college or university. These expectations have been met or exceeded by the following margins:

- **100%** of the LEAP Academy senior class graduated from high school on time and met all state graduation requirements.
- **96%** of the LEAP Academy 2023 graduating seniors (i.e., 115 students) completed coursework in the Early College program and received transferrable college credits from Rutgers University-Camden and Rowan University.
- **100%** of the LEAP Academy 2023 graduating seniors gained admission into an accredited college or university.

It should also be noted that the LEAP Academy high school students have displayed a tremendous amount of self-motivation that has propelled them to seek early admission to institutions that have partnered with the Early College program. This allows these students to maximize the college credits they have accrued through the program. A total of 31 students have committed to attending one of the three Rutgers University campuses (i.e., New Brunswick, Camden, and Newark) and



20 of the students are attending one of the Rowan University campus programs (i.e., Glassboro, Gloucester, Burlington, and Rowan Choice-Camden).

High-Quality Instruction

The high level of instruction achieved at the LEAP Academy is maintained through continual evaluation and retooling of processes. Professional development is a key component of this, and the LEAP Academy provides quality, intentional, and customized continuing education and coaching for all instructors. Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds have been applied to prepare the instructional leaders of the academy to address a continually changing learning landscape with learning loss as a primary concern. As a result, the teachers of LEAP Academy are elevating the learning content of lessons and providing academic support services to target students at their specific level of performance.

New resources have been made available through a grant from the Camden Education Fund. These include training in the fields of special education and English language learner capabilities. Programs such as Rosetta Stone and GoalBook have now been added to the portfolio of programs available to students in these learning categories.

Overall, The LEAP Academy provides its students with an effective and supportive learning environment with culturally responsive teaching. Students are given the resources they need to thrive and succeed. Forward momentum in this educational

“In response to the pandemic, we’ve implemented a comprehensive strategy to navigate the challenges of COVID. We understand that to mitigate ‘learning loss’ there must first be a shared vision among the adults who are here to serve and support our students. Our strategy is grounded on delivering differentiated and targeted professional development for our teachers based on the insights gathered through assessments, providing them with ongoing and actionable feedback while simultaneously leveraging their existing strengths.”

Jozian Molina, Chief Academic Officer & LEAP Alumni



“LEAP Academy is prioritizing teacher development in a number of ways. We are carefully planning professional development days to target support for our teachers, differentiated based on their years of experience, grade-level, teaching subject and interests. Additionally, we are providing real-time coaching and mentoring for our new teachers. LEAP is also developing our teacher leaders to both establish model classrooms and to expand their instructional leadership to ensure all students receive an excellent educational experience.”

– Nicole Kessler, Chief of Teaching and Learning

institution is then quantified by collecting the right data to gauge progress as well as challenges. Instructional rigor and student engagement are kept at a high level with attendance rates that reflect student engagement and active participation in their own educational progress. Teachers strive to incorporate the students’ own unique experiences into the development of their lesson plans, making the learning process relevant and accessible. Students are aware of what they are learning and why it is important to their growth and development. Interdisciplinary learning is provided and enhanced using online platforms including appropriate apps, podcasts, software, and other resources. The integration of technology is essential in preparing the student body for college and career readiness. This creates a foundation for building a future for LEAP Academy students beyond the walls of the institution.

The Rutgers/LEAP Partnership: Sustaining the Birth through 16 Trajectory

Rutgers University–Camden responded to the call for innovative approaches that could impact the access and success of first-generation students in Camden to enter the university. The reality today, as it was 30 years ago when LEAP Academy was envisioned, is that a college degree is increasingly becoming necessary to succeed in today’s economy.

A college degree can also be the key to achieving the American



dream. For first-generation college students, the unknown of college is daunting. They are the first in their family to navigate the world of higher education and often do not have anyone to turn to for advice or support.

Rutgers University–Camden has been the main higher education partner of the LEAP Academy University Charter School. Since LEAP Academy’s inception, Rutgers has intentionally collaborated as a strategic partner with an investment in the K-12 educational experience. Through the LEAP Academy, Rutgers supports pipelines that prepare students from Camden to achieve a path to higher education, including eventual study at Rutgers University. Furthermore, during their time at the LEAP Academy, students have access to Rutgers staff through the Early College Program and additional exposure to the scholars who are members of the academic institution at large. The

collaboration with Rutgers faculty has led to LEAP students publishing in academic journals and presenting their work at academic conferences.

The rich and fluid partnerships that have been developed between Rutgers and LEAP Academy make this effort a national model as the higher education community is seeking to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, while also ensuring that students from the city are successful in their quest for a college degree. The partnership between LEAP Academy and Rutgers now reaches faculty, students, and campus units all working to ensure that they are engaged in supporting LEAP students. This interaction also utilizes LEAP as an opportunity to expose Rutgers students to experiential learning, faculty support, research, and actual coursework that promotes service learning as a core element in teaching and learning.



Rutgers University’s partnership with the LEAP Academy Early College Program is very strong. In fact, many of our graduates chose to continue with Rutgers as they pursue higher education.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total Students
Total LEAP Graduates	116	103	104	118	119	560
Committed to Rutgers – Camden	24	20	16	29	31	120
Committed to Rutgers – New Brunswick	1	4	3	5	1	14
Committed to Rutgers – Newark				3	0	3



Some notable examples include the work of Dr. Eric Klein through the Rutgers University-Camden Center for Computational and Integrative Biology (CCIB). With the help of Dr. Klein and his students, LEAP Academy students participated in the Coriell Institute Science Fair last year, winning first place and advancing on to Regionals.

Rutgers Community Leadership Center (CLC) also assigned a full-time staff member to work with the LEAP Academy to coordinate new programs in the areas of social, emotional, and leadership development. These programs, coordinated through the exemplary work of Donna Robertson, include:

- Queens - Self Love, which focuses on second through fifth-grade girls as they work through a series of workshops and activities. Parents participated in this program by providing snacks and drinks. Parents were also invited to presentations and were encouraged to participate in special events.
- YEP- Youth Empowerment Program, which focuses on sixth through eighth-grade students and provides programming for conflict resolution and critical thinking.

Another important programming initiative is the provision of sports for middle school-aged students. The benefits of playing sports and participating in activities that boost physical health are paramount for the overall health of students. There are many benefits including: physical health, mental health, life and social skills, academic performance, sleep, and exercise habits. This

year the sports programs for middle school students included: girls' volleyball, flag football, soccer, and winter basketball.

Complete Picture of Educational Wellness – Engaging Parents and Community to Reach Students

To maintain the academic success that the LEAP Academy continually provides, faculty and staff realize that a complete picture of student wellness and engagement must engage families and include student needs. COVID-19 uncovered and amplified issues of fear, anxiety, trauma, isolation, and stress as well as growing public concern about economic instability and persistent racial inequities. The collaborative work with the LEAP Academy families and students also had to be refocused and targeted to ensure that a solid base of support and partnership was maintained. Families and parents have been essential elements for the school's sustainability as the LEAP Academy continues to build in not only developing children and youth but also strengthening families and communities.

While the LEAP Academy and Rutgers University have always worked to comprehensively meet the needs of students, the pandemic highlighted and amplified the need for holistic approaches to education grounded in the science of learning and development. These include support strategies such as



cross-agency interactions, integrated services, a positive school climate, and family, student, and community engagement.

To that end, there is ongoing communication with parents and guardians. This past year saw the continuation of the parent ambassador program in which parents are brought into the school to assist with various school functions and programs. Through a partnership with Rutgers University – School of Nursing and AmeriCorps, LEAP Academy worked to provide parents with training focused on providing a health and wellness program to other parents.

Working with the American Heart Association, a train-the-trainer program was adopted to teach parents to train and certify other parents in CPR throughout the community.

English as a second language (ESL) and Microsoft classes were also offered.

To ensure complete wellness in the student body and their families, the school has also increased the number of mental health staff available to serve the students. These mental health professionals are encouraged to work with teachers and parents to promote social, emotional, and academic well-being. Rutgers Social Work students were offered field practice placements to join these teams as they complete their training as future social workers, while also providing valuable service to the school. The school-based health center continues to provide COVID testing and vaccinations as it



expands its reach to families as well as students.

One important program to encourage family participation and ownership is the Annual Walk-A-Thon. This event focuses on wellness, serves as a fundraiser for the school, and has become an important opportunity for families and students to join together to enjoy what the LEAP Academy has to offer. Families walk across the Ben Franklin Bridge in order to raise funds for scholarships.

SPOTLIGHT ON FAB LAB

The Fab Lab Micro Enterprise LLC plays a pivotal role in enhancing the student experience at the LEAP Academy in several ways. The program provides various printing, design, prototypes, and fabrication services to established educational institutions and businesses located in and around Camden, NJ. Christopher McCrum, Assistant Director at Rutgers University provides some insight on the purpose and goals of this LEAP Academy program. To start he explains six points of benefit that the student participants receive:

- 1. Real-world Application:** The program provides students with the opportunity to apply their STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] knowledge and skills in a practical, real-world context. By offering printing, design, prototypes, and fabrication services to educational institutions and businesses, students engage in projects that directly relate to actual industry needs.
- 2. Hands-On Learning and Skill Development:** Students involved in the enterprise gain hands-on experience using advanced machinery and tools such as 3D printers, laser cutters, CNC [computer numerical control] routers, and other equipment. This practical experience is crucial in honing their technical skills, fostering innovation, and understanding the production processes.
- 3. Entrepreneurial Exposure:** By participating in the development of a web-based store and planning/implementing a school-based enterprise, students are exposed to the entrepreneurial aspects of running a business. This involvement allows them to learn managerial, marketing, supervisory, and leadership skills, preparing them for future roles in business or innovation.
- 4. Engagement with the Community:** Through offering services to established educational institutions and businesses in Camden and surrounding areas, students get the chance to engage directly with the community. This interaction allows them to understand the local needs and tailor their solutions, accordingly, fostering a sense of responsibility and community engagement.
- 5. Teacher Professional Development:** The program not only benefits students but also supports teacher professional development. Teachers receive tailored training in experimental and project-based learning, empowering them to integrate these innovative teaching methods into their curriculum, thus improving their effectiveness in fostering student engagement and learning.
- 6. Cultivating Global Citizens:** The projects undertaken through the Fab Lab contribute to the vision of building global citizens. By exposing students to diverse challenges and encouraging them to create solutions, the program fosters a mindset of global responsibility and citizenship.





When asked about his personal experience with Fab Lab, Mr. McCrum shares, “As the Fab Lab Director overseeing the LEAP Academy during the 2022-2023 school year, I’ve had a diverse and enriching experience witnessing the impact of various programs on our students. The Sphero robotics program with our 3rd-grade students has been particularly remarkable. Seeing their enthusiasm and engagement in learning through hands-on experiences with robotics has been incredibly rewarding. It’s evident that these initiatives not only spark interest but also foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills at an early age.”

He goes on to explain, “Another significant highlight was the successful hosting of the Makers Day Event for the city of Camden. The event served as a platform to showcase our students’ creativity, innovation, and the practical application of their skills. It was inspiring to witness the broader community’s involvement and interest in the work and projects presented by our students.”

EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAM

Reaching Beyond the Typical High School Experience



The transition from high school to college can be challenging for many students. Academic rigor is increased while independence is expected. Many students struggle with balancing and prioritizing the tasks of their academic lives. Add to this the pressure of the monetary burden of a college education and even the most dedicated students can feel overwhelmed and even defeated.

Working with Rutgers University-Camden and its various schools, the LEAP Academy University Charter School has been able to continue the implementation of its Early College Program, a transformative effort that replaces the traditional senior year in a high school with a fully immersed year as a college student. Partnering with the neighboring institutions of Rutgers University-Camden, Rowan University, and Camden

County College, LEAP Academy seniors have been taking a full load of courses at one of the universities, earning an average of 30 college credits upon graduation. Entering college with this impressive sum of credits puts the Early College Program participants far ahead of other incoming college freshmen.

The results have been outstanding, and LEAP Academy students have shown that with encouragement and structure, they can be successful. The benefits of this program are multifaceted. Preparation for college life is a primary goal. Students don't only take courses that address topics at a college level—they take actual college courses while experiencing an actual college classroom with professors providing advanced lectures and assignments. Additionally, they receive support and supplementary teaching from the LEAP Academy staff to help guide them through the skills of retaining information, time management, subject analysis, and study strategies.

For students participating in this program, college is no longer an unknown or foreign concept, it is a part of their weekly academic life. The demystifying of the college experience prepares high schoolers to succeed as undergrads once they officially begin their journey through higher education. Those students who have never had exposure to college through friends or relatives, become acclimated to what it means to be an actual college student. They are given guidance through the LEAP Academy, and they gain confidence through immersion in college academic life.

Multifaceted Benefits

The financial burden of college is something that is also addressed through the program. College credits are expensive. Every credit earned through the Early College Program is money saved. Students who accrue the maximum number of credits offered can make a real dent in their college tuition costs. The program is, furthermore, offered to eligible students with no out-of-pocket costs.

The overwhelming majority of LEAP Academy students are first-generation college students. This program embraces the contributions these LEAP Academy students can make to the campus and to society as future professionals. Education can eradicate poverty and open doors to a prosperous life trajectory. The higher education institutions are also very fortunate as they are able to ensure that their student enrollment is diverse and inclusive and that it represents the reality of society. The experiences offered through the Early College Program ensure that students achieve a “sense of belonging.” The process of engaging these students as academics begins before they are officially admitted as freshmen.



Perspectives from the Field

Oscar Holmes IV, Ph.D., SHRM-SCP, is the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs, Associate Professor, & Director, RUSE Program at Rutgers School of Business–Camden and he has witnessed first-hand how the LEAP Academy Early College program students have thrived on campus.

“For the most part, I have found the students to be curious, excited about learning, and willing to take advantage of opportunities given to them,” shared Dr. Holmes. These students have met the new experiences offered by the college lifestyle with openness and have shown a hunger for learning.

When asked if these LEAP Academy high school students are prepared for the challenges of college, Dr. Holmes without hesitation says, Absolutely, as they are taking real college classes. The expectations are there for them from Day 1 and they are given college-level work.”

It's not just the LEAP Academy high school students who benefit from the Early College Program, but the Rutgers community as well. As explained by Dr. Holmes, “We invite the LEAP students to other campus events and they have been a welcomed addition. They ask interesting questions and bring a lot of excitement to our campus that is much appreciated.”

Dr. Holmes has high hopes for the program in the future and looks forward to its continuation and expansion, “I hope the program grows to afford more students with the opportunities.”

Time and again the success of this program can be seen in the success of the students. Alumni of the program not only complete their college education, but many of them also go on to graduate work as well. The Early College Program exemplifies LEAP's comprehensive and innovative approach to community development and urban education, supported by its track record of 100% high school graduation and college placement. In many ways, the Early College Program is the embodiment of the LEAP Academy's cradle-to-college-to-career initiative.

Returning Alumni

An important strategy in the succession planning for the LEAP Academy has been the investment of its graduates and alumni. The school has intentionally cultivated its graduates to return to the school as professional college graduates and valuable members of staff, board members, and volunteers. This is an important element of the school's success. Returning alumni bring with them the following three assets:

- 1) A sense of gratitude as they now can fully appreciate what the LEAP Academy has done for them.
- 2) A set of skills developed through their college journey and experiences they gathered through college life that they can share with other students.
- 3) A deep understanding of the students that the LEAP Academy serves and their needs.

THE FOLLOWING ARE LEAP ACADEMY ALUMNI WHO NOW SERVE THE SCHOOL AS INVALUABLE MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY AND STAFF:

Joziana Molina

Class of 2010
Chief Academic Officer

Brielle Nieves

Class of 2019
6th Grade ELA Teacher

Vanessa Schonewolf

Class of 2010
Dean of Students

Amanda Beltran

Class of 2014
Director of Early College

Silvia Vasquez

Class of 2005
STEAM Teacher



“When you think about what makes institutions like LEAP Academy so successful, it is the people. The parents feel connected. The success of their student and every student at the academy is important to the community and to the families. And when you feel like you have that kind of support network around you, you can do amazing things.”

Dean John Griffin, Dean of Rutgers-Camden Faculty of Arts and Sciences

EARLY COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT



Bryanna Lester, LEAP Academy and Early College Alumni, Shares Her Experience

“Being a LEAP Academy student has been a transformative experience that has shaped my academic journey in so many ways. I’ve been a part of the dual enrollment program since 10th grade, and it has provided me with the preparation and readiness necessary to excel in the Early College Program. This unique opportunity has not only challenged me but has also instilled in me a deep sense of confidence in my abilities to get into the University of my dreams and pursue my aspirations of being a criminal defense attorney.”

Returning Alumni Spotlights

“As a LEAP alum, returning to the community that shaped me was an undeniable calling. I wanted to be the teacher I wished I had—an educator from the same community, someone who looks like me, talks like me, and understands the unique challenges of growing up in an urban environment.”

Brielle Nieves, Class of 2019
6th Grade ELA Teacher



“As a first-generation student, I faced numerous challenges on my journey to high school and college graduation. LEAP played a pivotal role in easing my path, and now, armed with the knowledge of the hurdles, I’ve returned to work at LEAP. My aim is to make the journey even smoother for students like me, helping them attain a college degree with greater ease.”

Silvia Vasquez, Class of 2005
STEAM Teacher



“I strongly believe that these students deserve a positive role model. Returning as the Dean of Students, I am confident that I can make a meaningful impact!”

Vanessa Schonewolf, Class of 2010
Dean of Students

“As a Camden native and LEAP alumni, I understand the challenges these students face. I, too, navigated the LEAP pipeline, becoming a first-generation college student. I’ve experienced what many of these students are going through, and I want to provide them with the same support and guidance that molded me into who I am today. Returning to give back to the community that played a pivotal role in my success is incredibly fulfilling.”

Amanda Beltran, Class of 2014
Director of Early College



EARLY LEARNING RESEARCH ACADEMY

Inspiration from the Start: The Power of Early Learning



The Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA) continued its trajectory of excellence, as it transitioned to a post-COVID era in 2022-2023. Aligned with the research about the benefits of early learning and the impact it can have on future academic achievement, ELRA became a great asset for families and for the children who needed a new beginning.

Stimulating the young mind with proven academic intervention sets a child on the path of continued growth and development. One of the building blocks of the Community Leadership Center (CLC) is a cradle-to-college mentality that provides structure and support for children starting at a very young age.

ELRA is a testament to CLC's commitment to the children and families of Camden, providing an oasis of learning and childhood development. The program focuses on providing quality educational and enrichment experiences to children as young as infants up through preschool. The ELRA serves approximately 316 infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in Camden City per year.

Advanced Programs

For the approximately 56 infant enrollees aged 8 weeks to 3 years old, the (I-T) program embedded in the teaching structure

uses a dual language curriculum known as *World at Their Fingertips*, which was developed by Bright Horizon, Inc. As for the 260 preschoolers aged 3 to 5 years old, the program features a dual-language program that is a part of the Camden Board of Education's Early Childhood Program. These programs aim to strengthen cognitive, social, and emotional skills within the student body that will give them a critical head start in kindergarten.

Accredited Program

The ELRA program received its re-accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) this year. This is a testament of the efforts to ensure continuous quality-improvement strategies grounded on the latest research on best practices and family-focused approaches. Attaining accreditation from this program requires a great deal of time and effort, but it is worth it because it raises the level of education provided to the students. One of the main components to achieving NAEYC accreditation is adherence to the organization's 10 standards for high-quality early childhood education. These include:

- Promote positive relationships for all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth.
- Implement a curriculum that fosters all areas of child development: cognitive, emotional, language, physical, and social.
- Use developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches.
- Provide ongoing assessments of each child's learning and development and communicate the child's progress to the family.
- Promote the nutrition and health of children and protect children and staff from illness and injury.
- Employ and support a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse interests and needs.
- Establish and maintain collaborative relationships with each child's family.
- Establish relationships with and use the resources of the community to support the achievement of program goals.
- Provide a safe and healthy physical environment.
- Implement strong personnel, fiscal, and program management policies so that all children, families, and staff have high-quality experiences.

These standards align with the core of ELRA's mission and help



“As proud residents of the city for over a decade we are happy to have a place right in our backyard for our two daughters to start their educational journey. Watching our children thrive in the dual language program has been amazing. They come home each day having learned something new and are excited about the day they’ve had with their friends. The teachers are beyond caring and love helping our children explore the world and expand their minds through the many activities they put together. Their dedication to teaching our kids is unmatched. We drop our kids off and head to work every day knowing they are being nurtured physically, mentally, and emotionally. When people ask where our kids go to daycare, we proudly say ELRA and quickly correct them- our kids don’t go to daycare they are in an early childhood education program. ELRA provides children a jumpstart on their education both in hard and soft skills.”

Leslie Bryant

parent of ELRA student



to promote and enhance the positive evolution of ELRA's staff and faculty as educators.

Research Directive

The ELRA program also contributes to the study of developmental learning research. It capitalizes on the research mission of Rutgers University by documenting and advancing the exploration of early childhood education. The program contributes to the knowledge base of developmental education scholars while applying the latest techniques and protocols in order to best serve its student base.

Faculty and students from the Rutgers-Camden campus participated in a myriad of opportunities including faculty conducting research studies on a variety of issues that are relevant to learning about early childhood and how can we address early social and cognitive development. A number of students from Rutgers contribute to these opportunities by working as interns and volunteers, learning first-hand what it means to work with young children. These experiences not only enhanced their academic training but also motivated them to imagine themselves in a career in the field.

Socioeconomic inequities that rob a child of their full potential can be eradicated through consistent, purposeful, and meaningful instruction provided by motivated and qualified educational professionals. This is what the ELRA provides for its young students.



Furthermore, the affordable childcare provided through ELRA helps promote parent employment and family self-sufficiency. This has a positive impact on the overall economic welfare of the community. The program specifically serves those students who are, for the most part, eligible to receive childcare subsidies. This program sets these children on the course to academic success right from the start.

ELRA provides its students with foundational learning that will eventually carry them forward into the LEAP Academy Charter School where they will have access to the Early College Program offered to high schoolers. In many ways, the ELRA is a child's first stop on their journey toward higher education. They are breaking the chains of socioeconomic disparity to create robust futures and endless possibilities.

FACULTY AND STUDENT CONNECTIONS

Collaborations, Research, and New Horizons



The Rutgers Community Leadership Center (CLC) is focused not only on cultivating educational opportunities for young minds but is also dedicated to cultivating research and scholarship that will serve as the foundation for the future of diverse learning. To that end, the CLC continues to support doctoral and graduate-level students and engages with faculty from all disciplines and departments in developing applied research projects and opportunities.

Some of the scholarship currently being pursued in conjunction with the CLC includes:

- **David Masagnor** continued his fellowship at the CLC and is working on a study examining the Early College Program and its impact on minority students. He turned this into his dissertation project and is currently in the investigation phase of the study.
- **David Southgate** has been working on developing a research plan on the topic of “Critical climate adaptation: Counter hegemonic possibilities to climate

retreat for informal communities in south Puerto Rico’s largest coastal Barrio.” His research answers the following research questions: What are the determinants that allow informal communities to stay put amid hegemonic forces that would displace them due to climate change? How do displaced residents fare socially? How might adapting in place produce moral hazards? He plans to turn this into his doctoral dissertation.

- **Giovanna Romero**, a Ph.D. student in Public Affairs, has been working on the planning activities for the

development of a charter school network in Puerto Rico through the LEAP Social Enterprise and continues to support the Rutgers/Paraguay academic exchange.

- **Oluwasegun Oluwole** is a Nigerian Ph.D. student in the Department of Public Policy and Administration at Rutgers University-Camden. His research interest is in educational policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria. As a graduate assistant, he is working with the College Access Team on a project called the Highflier Scholars' Program, an implicitly multivariate project that aims to get talented students from LEAP Academy into Ivy League schools after graduation.

- **Vanessa Lopez** completed her master's degree in social work and fulfilled her Field Practice requirement with the Early Learning Research Academy. She is now a Family Worker with the program.

- **Olorunfunmi Adebajo**, a Nigerian student, is working with the Early Learning Research Academy to develop programs to support parents and families. She is a student in the Masters of Public Administration program.

Hands-on experience can be critical to the learning process. Therefore, experiential learning/student engagement has been encouraged and supported by the CLC faculty and staff. This continues a proud tradition of the CLC offering opportunities and a practice lab for students and faculty interested in engaging in applied learning opportunities. Some examples of this academic endeavor include:

- **Dr. Eric Klein** from the Biology Department is actively working with students from the LEAP Academy on various projects and this effort has already resulted in a LEAP student serving as co-author of a paper in a referred journal. He is currently also working with LEAP students



Oguz Kaan Ozalp and Marlo Rossi completed a case study on "Assessing Nutrition Security in Camden City, New Jersey: Assets, Barriers and Solutions". This case study explored the questions of: What are the potential areas for development to address nutrition security in Camden City? What are the existing barriers to addressing nutrition security in Camden? How does the analysis of capital and mapping of assets serve to help us understand nutritional security? Research findings indicated that the most significant challenges for community members in Camden are accessibility to nutritious food, availability of nutritious food supply in the neighborhoods, and low paying jobs that do not allow people to afford healthier food options. They concluded that Camden needs an adequate supply of food within the community to meet the population's dietary needs. This involves food production, distribution, and market access.

Mike Morgan and Paul Marone completed a case study titled "It's my street: Community Participation in Camden's Waterfront South Neighborhood, a Case Study." This case study explored how environmental justice, quality of life, and community organizing affects community participation. The case study explored the questions of: What community capital assets exist in Camden's Waterfront South neighborhood? What assets exist to bring residents together to realize their dreams for their community? Findings suggest community interest in strengthening Natural (trees) and Built (lights/streets) assets as a precursor for increased interest in community participation. The study highlights the importance of strategies for improving their quality of life as a driver for bringing people together in solidarity and increased participation. These are critical elements for sustainable community and economic development.

and Rutgers graduate students on developing projects to compete in the Corriell Science Fair, a prestigious local competition for high school students. Two of the LEAP students who have been working with him—Aimiyah Coleman and Hung Nguyen—are

co-authors on a recently accepted paper in *Nature Chemical Biology*. This is a very high-impact journal and these two students performed an important genetic screening for this study.

- Collaborating with **Professor Charlotte Markey** and the newly launched

Program on Preventive Science, two graduate students—**Yachun Wen** and **Citali Jimenez**, have been placed to work with the LEAP/ELRA collaborative, organizing data on student indicators, developing analyses, and creating a dashboard for sharing important metrics about how students are doing. This is a great opportunity for the program to receive services on data management and analysis while the students are also honing their quantitative and qualitative research skills.

- Each semester, the CLC supervises several courses for academic credit at Rutgers–Camden. The center works with various graduate and undergraduate departments on campus to arrange these courses, such as the Public Policy & Administration department, the Childhood Studies department, the School of Social Work, the Law School, the Dean’s Offices at the College of Arts & Sciences, the School of Nursing, and the School of Business. The focus is on promoting the concept of focused scholarship and civic engagement. This initiative allows eligible students to earn course credit through service-learning internships or to satisfy degree requirements for their undergraduate or graduate program’s field-based hours.

Global Scholarship

The collaborative work done by the CLC is not limited to the borders of New Jersey or the United States for that matter. As detailed in earlier sections of this report, there are programs throughout the globe, such as Paraguay and Puerto Rico, which have been established with a significant components of scholarly collaboration. Students and faculty, abroad and at home, have been encouraged to team up on a range of projects. Some of these projects have been developed with the intent of enriching the communities they study.



Support for Students

Through the YES Tutoring Program, the following students were given an opportunity to work one-on-one with LEAP Academy students in academic support:

- | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ Omoge Omeronye | ■ Malaysia Nelson | ■ Preveen Venkatachalam |
| ■ Andrea Sellers | ■ Miranda Stafford | ■ Prince Osei Bonsu |
| ■ Christine Eskander | ■ Monserrat Atenco-Sanchez | ■ Ryan Wagner |
| ■ Gabriel Kaufman | ■ Nabiha Samra | ■ Sachin Muppavaram |
| ■ Haley Lackore | ■ Nataly Lopez | ■ Sreya Kambhatla |
| ■ Hanan Allen | ■ Nitya Ramachandran | ■ Vivek U. Modi |
| ■ Kunal Nilakhe | ■ Pranita Gujar | ■ Yezane Marrero |
| ■ Lelah Takhna | | |

Students who participated in the JUMPSTART program in 2022-23, include:

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| ■ Aneesah Timbo | ■ Endiyah Fleming | ■ Nicol Vargas Pena |
| ■ Angelina Cheng | ■ Jade Miller | ■ Niya Harling |
| ■ Anh Ly | ■ Janet Felix | ■ Noor Iman |
| ■ Aniyah Davis | ■ Keliah Blenman | ■ Rachael Parker |
| ■ An’tonio Vadell | ■ Lelah Tekhna | ■ Sofia Linares-Martinez |
| ■ Bree Harris | ■ Lily Lam | ■ Zaniyah Nunez |
| ■ Caroline Chukwunyere | ■ Na’shon Wilson | ■ Zhonee Grant |

STEM fellows were selected to work under STEAM faculty on various projects with the schools in 2022-23. These participants include:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| ■ Chioma Uchendu | ■ Chris-Ann Bryan |
| ■ Jahmal Ennis | ■ Helen Stott |
| ■ Noureen Abdelrahman (graduated) | ■ Temitope Akinode |
| ■ Mariadelia Arguello Acuna (graduated) | ■ Amanpreet Kaur (no longer in CCIB) |
| | ■ Abneris Morales |

THE JUMPSTART PROGRAM

Inspiring a New Generation of Educators Through Engaged Service Learning



The Community Leadership Center (CLC) seizes on opportunities that are grounded on reciprocity. One of these efforts is the JumpStart initiative, which serves as a catalyst for college student interest in early education, while also providing children with additional support in literacy development. The Rutgers CLC hosted the first JumpStart Program in New Jersey and has sustained this effort as an important initiative for its early childhood agenda as well as for its engaged scholarship efforts.

Teacher and Student

The mission of JumpStart is to provide language, literacy, and social-emotional programming for preschool children from under-resourced communities and promote quality early learning for all. Founded in 1994 by four college students, Jumpstart for Young Children envisions an America where every child enters kindergarten prepared to succeed. To date, the organization has trained more than 45,000 college students.



Designed to build the skills that are critical to language, literacy, and social-emotional development, JumpStart's curriculum focuses on vocabulary, comprehension, knowledge of the alphabet, writing, phonetics, and rhyme awareness. Rutgers student volunteers receive extensive training as well as ongoing coaching. A recent study found that children who participate in the JumpStart program achieved 1.5 times the gains in critical literacy skills than children who do not; 91% of participants made gains in language and literacy skills.

Rutgers students participating in this effort gain important skills that prepare them for a career in early childhood and to become advocates for early childhood education.

Exciting Programs

JumpStart's annual *Read for the Record* campaign brings together schools, libraries, community centers, and families for a shared reading-out-loud experience via the Internet. The organization provides activity sheets, reading guides, and other resources for the selected book. JumpStart also is piloting a number of new initiatives, including literacy-based texting programs, summer sessions, and partnerships with local housing authorities.

In addition, the organization mobilizes its alumni network to advocate for changes in education policy aimed at ensuring that high-quality early childhood education is available to every child—and as the most effective way to disrupt the cycle of persistent poverty.

Hands-on Experience

Experience is an important component of building a career in education. Unfortunately, some aspiring educators have a difficult time finding opportunities for hands-on experience in an academic setting. JumpStart is a national program focused on early learning that works to recruit college students to volunteer in the preschool setting.

JumpStart candidates are recruited based on their willingness to pledge 10-15 hours of work in the program per week, and their commitment to working in the position for one year. JumpStart students who are part of the CLC division of the program should ideally be enrolled in Rutgers University—Camden and have proven themselves as a leader. Furthermore, JumpStart participants should have a passion for community service, working in teams, a strong work ethic, and a willingness to learn about best practices in community and early childhood development.

The Early Research Academy (ELRA) has welcomed JumpStart Corps Members into its classrooms in downtown Camden to participate in the implementation of developmentally appropriate activities and lessons with the over 200 children who are a part of the ELRA program. These children are exposed to a proven curriculum that can enhance their language and literacy skills, which will be needed as they progress into the grammar school system. The focus is on setting these children on a path to close the achievement gap before it is too late, and the JumpStart participants are key participants in this process.



Ongoing Service

For the entire year of their service in the JumpStart Corp, the participants are paired with a small group of preschool students to provide instruction, build connections, and engage in meaningful ongoing service to the community. The children benefit from the attention these small groups afford and the student-participants benefit from the hands-on learning in a classroom setting.

JumpStart students committed to over 300 hours of service to the program between the Fall and Spring semesters. They are committed to keeping their schedule consistent throughout the academic year and must attend weekly planning meetings in addition to their regular schedule. These meetings help address any challenges that participants are facing, and they also give participants a behind-the-scenes look at the planning required in a successful academic environment. JumpStart participants are also expected to consistently prepare high-quality classroom materials and reliably attend to and perform classroom duties while adhering to standard procedures.

During the 2022-2023 school year 60 Rutgers University—Camden students participated in the program. The hope is that this mutually beneficial program will continue to thrive in years to come.

JumpStart has become a favorite program for many of our Rutgers first-generation students and this is an important asset for the program, as these students see themselves and their life trajectories in the children they serve. Too often the conversation about first-generation students has been about the challenges and struggles they face. The mindset has been deficit-based with a focus on what they lack rather than their strengths. JumpStart shifts that narrative, and considers its students, especially those who have faced challenges attending college, to be assets. This year we asked some JumpStarters for their perspectives on what motivated them to participate in JumpStart and how JumpStart impacted their college experiences. Their responses reveal a deep sense of commitment, the need to give back, and a commitment to be part of something transformational for the children.

Q&A with First Generation JumpStart Staff Members

As a first-generation student, what encouraged you to participate in JumpStart?

■ “Before becoming a Site Manager, I was a Jumpstart Corps Member for 3 years while I was an undergraduate student here at Rutgers University-Camden. I was initially encouraged to participate in JumpStart because of my best friend, she told me about the program and how much fun it was. As a first-year transfer student, I wanted to find a place on campus where I could meet other students and work with the youth in Camden City.”

---**Jozivana Molina, Site Manager**

■ I know what it’s like to come from an impoverished background with limited resources. As an FGS [first generation student] and someone who is entering a career in teaching, I wanted to join a program that helps kids like me get the resources they need to have an early start at pursuing upper education.”

---**Angelina Cheng**

■ “What encouraged me to participate in JumpStart was being around children and I just love to see children learn and grow from learning.”

---**Ricardo Benito-Aguilar**

■ “I have always worked in positions that consisted of helping small children so I thought I would be a good fit. I also would greatly appreciate the scholarship.”

---**Angelina Pabon**

■ “I want more kids to be able to go to college and have their own dreams.”

---**Qing Ru Lin**



How did JumpStart affect your college experience?

- The JumpStart program became my place to go on campus when I had breaks in between my classes. This affected my college experience because it encouraged me to stay on campus longer instead of going home right after my classes! After graduating with my bachelor's degree, life has led me back to JumpStart and I'm so grateful to be in the position of Site Manager. When I was a Corps Member my Site Manager, Gabriel Molina, became my mentor in the Higher Education field and I hope to become a mentor for my current students.

---**Jozivana Molina, Site Manager**

- I love JumpStart. This is my fourth year with JumpStart; I have created a lot of relationships with peers that I wouldn't have connected with through school because of differing majors. I have also bonded a lot with my supervisors and bosses as well, which is pretty unique.

---**Rachael Parker**



- JumpStart has definitely opened up more doors for me. I have almost 5 years of educational experience, but my experience at JumpStart has helped me network and get a lot more opportunities. Since working with JumpStart, I already have multiple teaching offers for after I graduate as well as fellowship offers. I probably wouldn't have gotten as many offers as I have been getting if it wasn't for JumpStart and AmeriCorps.

---**Angelina Cheng**

- "It has made me more empathetic and patient towards people."

---**Endiyah Fleming**

- "JumpStart has helped me see and appreciate the diversity of people in our community. It has given me the hope that the paths to our success can be as diverse as our individual talents. This can be achieved if we all participate in each other's education. I am a more hopeful person because of JumpStart."

---**Noor Iman**

- "Working with the kids has taught me a lot of patience. I joined JumpStart during the COVID-19 pandemic, so it has taught me how to effectively communicate with the children. I have also experienced a lot of personal growth while working with JumpStart."

---**Lily Lam**

RUTGERS ALFREDO & GLORIA BONILLA-SANTIAGO ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Sustaining the College Trajectory of LEAP Alumni



At the end of the day, the academic and developmental cradle-to-college-to-career trajectory of LEAP students truly takes root during their journey as college students. This premise is the foundation for the financial investment to establish and grow a scholarship fund. This has been at the core of the vision that has guided Dr. Gloria Bonilla Santiago's efforts and the main source for rallying support from parents, teachers, and staff at the LEAP Academy University Charter School.

This Endowed Scholarship was established in 1999 by the Community Leadership Center (CLC) director, Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, in loving memory of her husband, Alfredo Santiago. Recipients of the scholarship are selected annually from a pool of eligible LEAP Academy graduates. The selection process is based on academic achievement and financial needs with an emphasis on increasing the diversity of the Rutgers University student body. Latino and African American students who are pursuing what were once considered

non-traditional areas of study including business, science, engineering, and pre-medicine, are a special focus.

The quest for securing scholarship support begins in pre-school graduation when students transition to a K-12 educational system and join the prestigious Alfredo Santiago Scholars initiative. All through the various academic levels at LEAP, students who maintain a high GPA, serve as models for student behavior and attend school regularly have the opportunity to secure



Leaving a Legacy

The Gloria Bonilla and Alfredo Santiago Scholarship Fund has made a lasting impact not only on the recipients but also on the academic community their inclusion enriches.

Enacting an endowment is the establishment of a legacy that will touch lives in a very positive way. Endowments contribute to the long-term health of a university and under careful direction with purposeful and prudent investment the principal of the endowment can provide lasting and intact earnings.

Endowments can be used for a range of purposes. The Gloria Bonilla and Alfredo Santiago Scholarship Fund helps students achieve the benefit of higher learning at one of Rutgers University's three prestigious campuses.

Not only do the students benefit from the distinction and financial support of the scholarship, but the university that enrolls them also benefits by diversifying and strengthening their student body.

an award from the Endowed Scholarship Fund to attend Rutgers University.

Once a student is awarded the scholarship during their senior year at LEAP and is admitted to Rutgers, they may renew the award for an additional three years (or four years if they are in a five-year program). Students must maintain solid academic standing to be considered for renewal of the scholarship. Many of the Alfredo Santiago Scholars who have earned degrees from Rutgers University have gone on to work for major companies and organizations. In addition, many chose to pay it forward and regularly participate in LEAP

Academy events. Every year a different LEAP and Rutgers Alumni and Alfredo Santiago Scholarship recipient returns to speak at our annual gala to help raise funds for the endowment.

The Alfredo and Gloria Bonilla Santiago Scholarship Fund not only uplifts its student recipients, but it also uplifts a whole community. There is a very low rate of students seeking higher education in the Camden community. As a whole and just over half of the community achieves a high school diploma. This scholarship fund is making a difference in shifting these numbers and encourages its recipients not to forget where they

came from and to give back in turn. Camden's youth deserve greater access to and greater affordability of higher education and this scholarship program is helping to pave the way.

Through the work with Puerto Rico, the opportunity to benefit from the Gloria Bonilla & Alfredo Santiago Scholarship Fund has been extended to children enrolled in LEAP Schools in Puerto Rico. The school in Puerto Rico has formed the Alfredo Santiago Scholars program and its students are preparing to compete for these scholarships. Puerto Rico will graduate its first 12th grade class in 2024.

Past Recipients

Here is a complete list of the Rutgers Gloria Bonilla and Alfredo Santiago Scholarship Recipients from 2023-2024:

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY - NEW BRUSWICK

Hao Nguyen, School of Arts and Sciences
Orlando Figueroa, School of Environmental and Biological Sciences

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY - NEWARK

Jessica Phuong, Rutgers Business School
Jasmin Mendez, School of Criminal Justice

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY - CAMDEN

Cristal Pereira, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Essence Alford, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Cheska Mejia, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Jacquelyn Tran, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Janina Gonzalez, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Jennifer Rodriguez, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Karen Thach, Camden College of Arts

and Sciences
Kimberly Alfonso, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Omar Carrion, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Raquel Aviles, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Said Munoz, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Sany Macias, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Shawn Ruffin, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Tiffany Lam, Camden College of Arts and

Sciences
Tyrah Jackson, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Yelitza Delos Santos, Camden College of Arts and Sciences
Erik Reyes, School of Business-Camden
Junior Ovando, School of Business-Camden
Lucero Cruz, School of Business-Camden
Nhu Ngo, School of Business-Camden
Pedro Roderiguez, School of Business-Camden
Brian Allende, School of

The Gala celebrates this year's Distinguished Leadership Award Recipients which include:



Dr. Steven Klasko,
Advisor, General Catalyst.
Former President CEO,
Jefferson University &
Jefferson Health



Tony Gay, Vice President
& General Counsel
at PECO, an Exelon
Company



Jonathan Holloway,
President Rutgers, The
State University of New
Jersey



"I believe that there is no more important philanthropic investment than college scholarships. It is important to the individual, family, and to our greater society."

Elizabeth Dale, a former 2022 Leadership Honoree and Chief Business Development Investor Relations Officer at StartUp Health

Business-Camden

Yuderly Ramirez, School of
Business-Camden

Hope Salcedo, School of Nursing

Rae'lyn Freeman, school of Nursing

Somer Meyers, School of Nursing

Time for a Celebration

Friends and partners of the Rutgers CLC will be gathering to celebrate the year's successes at the annual Rutgers Alfredo Santiago Endowed Scholarship Fundraising Gala which will take place on Friday, December 8, 2023, at the Crystal Tea Room, 100 E Penn Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Attendees will enjoy a night of dinner, dancing, and magical moments. The event is black tie.

This year's Gala Chair is Elizabeth Dale, a former 2022 Leadership Honoree and Chief Business Development Investor Relations Officer at StartUp Health. The Gala Master of Ceremonies is Ukee Washington, Anchor, CBS News.

This year's Alumni Honoree Award Recipient is John Crespo 2019 LEAP Academy Alumni, 2023 Rutgers Graduate. Mr. Crespo is a Temple Graduate Program student who is pursuing its doctorate degree in Cancer Research.

We are all looking forward to celebrating the achievements of this scholarship program's outreach as well as those who have distinguished themselves as leaders and pioneers. We will toast to the promise of a robust future with the help of our supporters.

For those interested in supporting the Rutgers Alfredo Santiago Endowed Scholarship Fund, please visit: <https://clc.camden.rutgers.edu/make-a-gift/scholarship-fund/annual-gala/>

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